

(U) Supervisory Woes? Ask Zelda! -- Today's Column: 'No Fun To Be Caught in the Middle'

FROM: 'Zelda,' Dispenser of Advice for SID Supervisors

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Dear Zelda,

(U) I'm a civilian supervisor of military personnel, and I work for a military supervisor who also happens to be my employees' military supervisor. One of my military employees is being heavily tasked directly by my supervisor, often without my involvement, and my employee is asking me to work a transfer to get them out of the situation. The employee is being pulled in different directions with regard to priorities, and is stressed out and looking to flee.

(U) How should I handle this?

Signed,
Militarily challenged

Dear Challenged,

(U) It's no fun to be the cheese in a military panino* -- that is, squeezed between an enlisted person and his Commanding Officer (CO). In fact, it's enough to cause a meltdown!

(U) NSA's multicultural workforce can be challenging for a supervisor, with separate rules for dealing with military, civilian, and contractor employees. As the Agency has moved to a 50-50 military/civilian mix, this challenge has only grown -- especially for civilians at field sites, where **the percentage of military personnel may be much higher**.

(U) First of all, let me clarify that "Ask Zelda" is an informal advice column, and does not claim to present the "party line." Not knowing the specifics of your situation, such as the types of things this person is being tasked to do, the requirements of the position he is filling for you, the rank of the military supervisor, your grade, the branch of service in question, etc., my advice will be somewhat generic. There are formal resources you should be aware of to help you with this issue:

- the Senior Enlisted Leader for your organization,
- The NSA/CSS course "**LEAD 2044: Supervising Military Personnel**," and
- **D7P** -- the Office of Military Personnel;

...and I hope you avail yourself of them. That said, here are my suggestions.

(U) The key, as usual, is to communicate. You need to meet with the military supervisor (whom I will refer to as "Major Payne") as soon as possible to work this out. Keep in mind that you each have a job to accomplish and that you share a resource -- whether you like it or not -- and splitting it (him) down the middle is not an option!

(U) Approach MAJ Payne very respectfully with the attitude of "we have an issue we need to resolve," rather than "you are causing a problem." Present the situation in business terms, such as impact on mission and processes, and the confusion his direct tasking is causing. He is probably not even aware

there is a problem, since it's unlikely your employee would push back when his CO gives him an order. Mention that you cannot properly manage your human resources if he is tasking them outside of and not through you. Being a military officer, he should understand the importance of chain of command, and within the NSA workplace you are the link between Payne and your employee (whom I will call "Private Hell"). Ask Payne (nicely) to limit his requests of PVT Hell; solicit his ideas for improving the situation, and see if you can help him find other means of getting his tasks accomplished besides redirecting your employee.

(U) If this extraneous tasking is related to your organization's mission, ask MAJ Payne to task you, and you can then assign the appropriate person to it. If he is contradicting your mission tasking, you need to better understand his priorities so that you can correctly manage the work of your organization. Better yet, you could suggest that the two of you work out a priority system together.

(U) If outside military tasks are being levied on Hell that are to be completed during the workday, you must also be kept in the loop. Not only does this take resources away from your mission, but you are responsible for this employee during work hours. Now, be aware that in order to get ahead in his military career, the Private will need to participate in some service activities; however, this does not mean that you have to release him for every event that comes along. Work out a plan with the Major for how many hours a month -- and when -- Hell can be excused to work on or participate in service functions. This will vary, depending on the work center. For example, if the employee is standing watch, you would allow fewer absences and outside tasks than you would in a more relaxed workplace or one with a large staff that can fill in for one another. And if the outside demands are too great, know that you have the right to ask for an additional or replacement worker.

(U) Lastly, don't forget to reassure Private Hell. Let him know that you are taking action to correct the situation. Following your meeting with MAJ Payne, tell him what was agreed upon. If applicable, you might take this opportunity to praise his performance, since the reason he is being tasked so heavily is probably because both his supervisors find him competent and their "go to" person to get the job done.

(U) I wish I could say there was a simple, definitive policy in a case like this, but the truth is you are expected to work it out between the two of you. You must share. With some flexibility and understanding on both sides, your military panino will be filled with a nicely chilled tuna salad, rather than a melted cheesy mess.

Zelda

(U) Notes:

* (U) A type of Italian sandwich, usually toasted by being pressed in a grill.

(U) Do you have a question of your own for Zelda? Use the "comments/suggestions about this article" link (below right) to submit your question; we'll make sure it gets to Zelda.

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